

How Parks Across the US Promote Health/Wellness

Baltimore, Maryland

May 29, 2002 was National Senior Health and Fitness Day and the City of Baltimore Park and Recreation Department partnered with the Commission on Aging to sponsor a one-mile Senior Walk in downtown Baltimore. Hospitals also helped to transport ten buses full of seniors, approximately 450 individuals, to the downtown area to participate in the walk, a health fair, line-dancing and low-impact aerobics, and consumption of healthy refreshments.

Boise, Idaho

The Boise Park and Recreation Department aims to integrate youth with disabilities into community recreation programs that also include youth without disabilities. Program activities include rafting, fishing, biking, camping, adaptive water skiing, canoeing, snowshoeing, cross-country skiing, hiking, arts and crafts, and creative dance. The program provided direct services to 670 youth (with and without disabilities) in the first year ('00-'01) and plans to serve 870 youth this year. It targets youth with developmental, mental, and physical disabilities, especially those from low-income families.

Fort Worth, Texas

The City of Fort Worth Park and Recreation Department provides opportunities for individuals of all ages to be physically active every day. The department offers lunchtime basketball leagues, five swimming pools, five golf courses, hiking and biking trails, soccer fields, 20 community centers--some with weight rooms, and an athletic center. Adults can also attend a variety of classes, such as martial arts, dance, and others. Recreation programs for seniors include aerobics and other forms of active recreation, available in all of the city's community centers. The department also offers numerous sports and active recreation programs for children and adolescents.

Graham, North Carolina

Funded by a grant from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the North Carolina Department of Public Health, Graham Parks and Recreation Department, and Be Active North Carolina have partnered to provide opportunities for physical activity to underserved children and adolescents. The "Movin' Van" program targets overweight children ages 9 through 13 who live in Graham public housing. Physical activity specialists travel in a van to bring active recreation, such as equipment for sports and games, to two low-income neighborhoods three times a week during after school hours or in the morning (during the summer). Two private companies, Polar Electro and Healthfirst, USA, donated equipment that will be used to gather project health data.

Lewiston, Maine

The Lewiston, Maine Park and Recreation Department organizes numerous community events throughout the year in which community and public agencies can conduct health-related outreach activities. During many of these community events, the park and recreation department invites representatives from many sectors of the community to conduct outreach and health screenings including: St. Mary's Regional Hospital, the police athletic league, the police and fire departments, domestic violence advocates, runaway and abused children agencies, AmeriCorps volunteers, juvenile justice and delinquency prevention programs, a law-enforcement group of high-school students, the SPCA and others.

Manchester, Vermont

In Manchester, seniors meet weekly at a recreation center for a one mile Precision Walk. Each participant estimates how long it will take him/her to walk the mile and those who meet or beat their estimates win prizes. Afterwards, the park and recreation department serves the seniors bagels and coffee and provides them with time to socialize. The walking times of the winners are posted each week in the local newspaper.

Michigan

The Michigan Recreation and Park Association's Walk Michigan is offered through public park and recreation departments in Michigan. The agencies host walks to promote better utilization and knowledge of parks and trails. Each time a participant walks, s/he fills out a card to be entered in a drawing for a Labor Day weekend trip to walk the Mackinac Bridge, a bridge that connects the upper and lower peninsulas of Michigan--a 5-mile trek with spectacular scenery. Check out their website at www.mrpaonline.org for more information.

Nevada

Two regions in the state host an annual month-long "Corporate Challenge." Public park and recreation departments in the cities of Sparks, Reno, Henderson, Las Vegas, North Las Vegas, and in Washoe County partner with corporations to provide adults of all ages with opportunities for physical activity such as swimming, bicycle races, track and field events, and archery. At least 5,000 individuals in each region participate in these events. Washoe County Parks also hosts an annual Health, Fitness and Fun Fair that coincides with National Health Week and National Immunization Week. Doctors, chiropractors, masseuses, public health educators, hospital representatives, independent living service providers, domestic violence agency staff, and others serve as vendors at the fairs. In addition, attendees can give blood at the Blood Bank, children learn in the COW Bus (Classroom On Wheels), and persons of all ages are offered free health screenings and healthy food, juice, milk, and water. Many park and recreation agencies in Nevada sponsor summer camps for children with opportunities for physical activity, nature hikes, and other outdoor recreation. Most park and

recreation agencies in Nevada also offer sports leagues (soccer, baseball, etc.) and classes such as aerobics, dance, karate, etc.

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

The health and social service activities of youth access centers in Philadelphia intermingle with their recreational and cultural programs. The centers extended hours' make them accessible. Social workers at the centers provide mental health services and prevention education to youth, help them receive health insurance, and refer parents to places where their children can get immunizations and preventive health care.

San Francisco, California

With their current Rehabilitation Services Administration recreation grant, San Francisco State University and the City and County of San Francisco Recreation and Park Department are alerting some 5,000 people with disabilities to community resources and increasing the vocational and social skills of approximately 500 persons with disabilities. In the past two years, over 300 recreation and park agency staff received sensitivity and program training to better serve people with disabilities.

St. Petersburg, Florida

The St. Petersburg Office on Aging is a division of the City of St. Petersburg's Recreation Department. The Office on Aging sponsors or co-sponsors health promotion events throughout the year such as: an annual fall Health Fair, an annual spring health maintenance education event, a National Senior Health and Fitness Day Health Fair, an annual Job Mart for Workers 40+, City Disaster Operations Planning for Family Shelter, Web Access Training for Health Care Information for seniors, specialized workshops such as "Senior Services and How to Access Them," a "Lunch & Learn" series with topics such as "How to Get Good Quality Nursing Home Care," and seasonal programs such as "Eating Healthy for the Holidays." The Office on Aging also offers ongoing programs such as Health Watch, to assess health risks of low to moderate income seniors and refer them to appropriate services, "Ask-A-Doctor" in which Pinellas County Mobile Medical Unit staff offer blood pressure monitoring to seniors on most Fridays, free cholesterol and glaucoma screenings every second Friday, S.H.I.N.E., an insurance counseling program for the elderly, a loan program for medical equipment (wheelchairs and canes), daily opportunities for low-impact exercise and yoga, and a monthly support group for caregivers. Through these programs and events, the Office on Aging seeks to maximize independent functioning of older adults and enable them to remain in control of their lives.

Wausau, Wisconsin

For the past 12 years the Wausau Park and Recreation Department has partnered with businesses and volunteers to provide "Ski for Youth" in which approximately 250 youth receive free lessons and opportunities to ski. During the

Department's after school programs, the Wisconsin Nutrition Office sends speakers to teach children about healthy and nutritious snacks. The department provided swimming opportunities to more than 60,000 individuals in the summer of 2001. With funds from a Weed and Seed grant, the department provides a four-month long lifeguard training program for youth in high-risk environments. In the Start Smart program for families, parents learn how to teach their young children (aged 3-5) basic sports skills. Similarly, the Kitchen Kids program offers parents the opportunity to learn how to make healthy no-bake snacks with their young children (aged 2-4). Each May, the department convenes "Senior Olympics" in which at least 50 seniors compete in sports such as golf, basketball short shot, bowling, table tennis, and others. And all of the department strives to make its programs inclusive and available to all individuals, with and without disabilities.

White Plains, New York

The Department of Parks and Recreation in White Plains, New York provides community members with opportunities for physical activity daily. The department encourages seniors to participate in classes such as yoga, t'ai chi, and chair aerobics. A mental health nurse convenes a "Let's Talk" meeting once a month with the seniors. And each month, the park and recreation department arranges for a speaker to talk to seniors about a health issue such as cholesterol, diabetes, heart disease, and others. The department celebrated National Senior Health and Fitness Day 2002 by providing seniors with opportunities to participate in line dancing and belly dancing classes.